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THE DIARY OF AN OPTIMIST

AN ILLUSTRATION
TO C. READE'S
'PEG WOFFINGTON'
BY HUGH THOMSON



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THE DIARY OF AN OPTIMIST

'SPAIN : THE STORY OF A JOURNEY'

By JOZEF ISRAELS. (London : John C. Nimmo, 1900.)

Many a younger man may well look with envy upon the never failing energy and cheerful spirit of the Septuagenarian, Jozef Israels. To face the fatigue, discomfort and bad food inseparable from a journey to Spain, is in itself a feat for a man of the advanced age of seventy-five. To return and immediately undertake the writing and illustrating of a voluminous book is even more surprising ; but what has to be admired most is the youthful enthusiasm and unruffled optimism of the aged artist. Everything appears to him in a rosy light, every vexing little contrempts is turned into a source of pleasure.

At the very outset of the book his serene frame of mind is shown in the description of his peaceful home : 'I look round in this little corner of the world, arranged for me alone, and I rejoice.' But, nevertheless, he starts with pleasure and with the eager expectation of a youth on his long pilgrimage. The first halt is made in Brussels, where the Opera is visited. He longs to hear Mozart, which does not prevent him from intoxicating himself with the

'glorious flood of harmony' of Wagner's 'Tristan and Isolde.' He is much annoyed at the intrusion of a stranger into a compartment which he thought reserved for himself and his two companions,—and after half-an-hour he declares the intruder to be the best of companions, 'a living guide-book and an adept at conversation'—'just as though we had engaged him for the purpose.'

At the bull-fight he sees nothing but gorgeous colour, beauty and an interesting display of human skill, and none of the revolting sights one usually connects with this kind of 'sport.' He thinks his own compatriot Rembrandt the greatest of all painters, but does not let this view interfere with his enjoyment of Velasquez' masterpieces. Illness of one of his companions, discomfort, a stormy passage to Tangiers for him who confesses to be a bad sailor, nothing can interfere with his indestructible good spirits. To the art-student we can recommend the volume, if only for the impartial and intelligent criticism of Velasquez, Murillo, and other masters of the Spanish School.